



Marine Biology

Lab _____

Lab: Are sturgeon More Like Sharks or Bony Fish?

Introduction

Ichthyology is the study of fish in the oceans, but, “fish” is a broad term. Fish are defined as any free swimming vertebrate that is **ecothermic**, has two sets of paired fins and several unpaired fins. Fish can actually be divided into two smaller groups, either **Chondrichthyes** (sharks, rays and skates) or **Osteichthyes** (bony fish). This class has already examined sharks. This lab will illustrate the characteristics of bony fish that separate them from sharks. Finally, you will be presented with pictures of sturgeon, a once abundant species that inhabits the rivers and coastal marine waters from Canada to Florida. You must decide if sturgeon belong in class Chondrichthyes or class Osteichthyes.

Pre-Lab Assignment Below, write five different characteristics that are unique of sharks.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Procedure: External Anatomy

1. At your lab stations, get a set of dissection equipment consisting of dissection pan, scissors, forceps, hand lens, and blunt probes.
2. Bring the pan to the front bench and get a fish.
3. Back at your station, and using the descriptions below, identify the external structures of your fish writing the answers to any questions that are posed.

Eyes - Fish eyes serve a variety of purposes - to seek out food, to avoid predators and other dangers, and, perhaps even to navigate in the ocean. Fish do not have eyelids. They are constantly bathed in water and do not need tears.

4. Using your finger, gently move the eye in its socket. Is there an eyelid present? _____

Nostrils – Some fish have a well developed sense of smell and use this ability to seek out their home streams for spawning. In some cases, this scent is also helpful in avoiding predators. Fish breathe through their gills, not their nostrils.

Lateral Line - Fish do not have ears, as such. In part, low frequency sounds are detected in the water through a system of small holes along each side of a fish called the lateral line, which is connected to a delicate system of nerves. They also react to medium frequencies suggesting they detect these as well (this reaction is not well understood at this time).

Mouth - Fish use their mouth to catch and hold food of various types, but their food is not chewed before swallowing, it is swallowed whole. The mouth is the beginning of the fish's alimentary canal (digestive tract). In addition, it is a very important part of the breathing process. Water is constantly taken in through the mouth and forced out over the gills where oxygen is extracted.

5. Feel inside the mouth for teeth. Open and close the mouth. Describe how the upper and lower jaw articulates during this movement.

6. Examine the upper and lower jaw. Does the lower jaw stick out further? This would mean the fish eats by attacking its prey from below. Or does the upper jaw stick out further? This would mean the fish eats by attacking its prey from above. Do both jaws meet at one common point? This fish eats by attacking from above or below. What direction do you think your fish attacks its prey from and why?

Vent - The external opening of the alimentary canal. Urine, feces, eggs and milt exit here.

Gills - Fish gills are composed of two basic parts, the gill covers and the gill filaments. The gill cover, a bony structure called the **operculum**, protects delicate filaments and, together with the mouth, forces water containing oxygen over the gills. The gills are probably one of the most important organs in the body of a fish. They are delicate but very effective breathing mechanisms. Gills are far more efficient than human lungs, because they extract 80% of the oxygen dissolved in water, while human lungs only extract 25% of the oxygen in the air.

7. Grasp the operculum to feel the bony structure. What is the benefit of having an operculum?

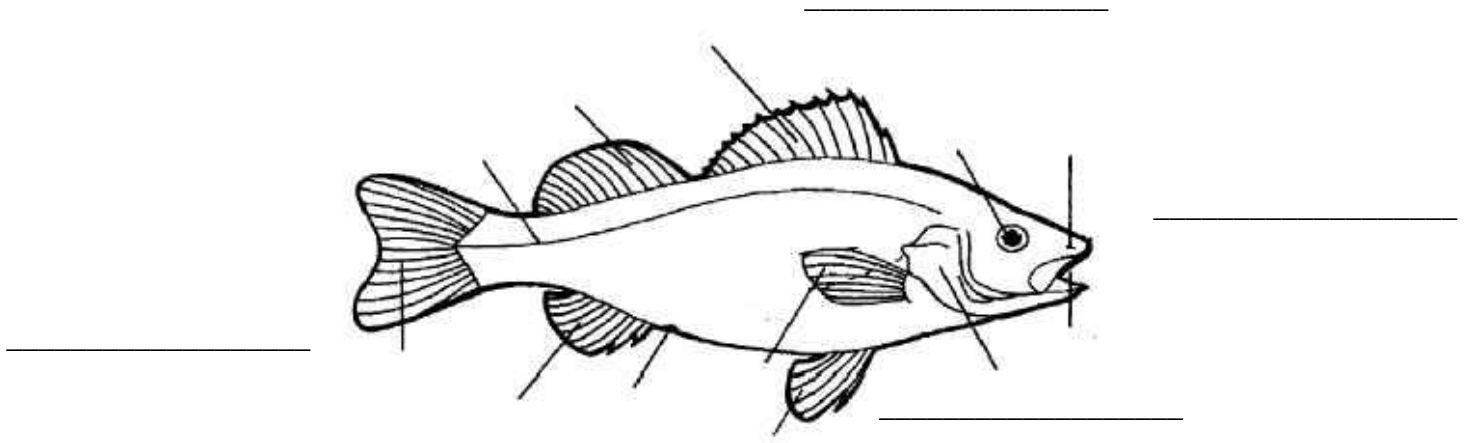
Gills are thin walled structures, filled with blood vessels. Their structure is arranged so that they are constantly bathed in water. The fish takes in the water through its mouth. The oxygen dissolved in the water is absorbed through the thin membranes into the fish's blood. Carbon dioxide is simultaneously released from the blood into the water across the same membranes.

8. Open the operculum and look inside at the gills. Describe them, using three different adjectives. _____

Fins – Fish have two sets of paired fins (pelvic and pectoral) and four single fins (dorsal, caudal and anal). Fish can contract their muscles and move the pelvic and pectoral fins for movement in all directions. The caudal fin is used for forward momentum. The dorsal and anal fins aid in

stabilizing the fish in the water and preventing it from rolling. All fish fins are made of bony fin rays that are connected to each other with a thin membranous tissue.

9. On the fish diagram below, label it with the name of the structures as well as determining the anterior, posterior, dorsal and ventral sides of the fish.



Scales - The bodies of fish are protected by scales which grow in regular concentric patterns and can be used to determine the age and life history of the fish. Over the scales is a layer of mucous (slime) which further protects the fish from disease organisms and helps it slide through the water more easily.

10. Use the sharp edge of your scissors to take off one of the scales. Use a hand lens to look at the rings. By counting the larger rings, researchers can tell the approximate age of a fish. How old is your fish?

Procedure: Internal Anatomy

1. Place the fish on its side in the dissection pan, belly towards you, head pointing to your right. Insert a pair of sharp dissection scissors into the vent and make a shallow cut up to and between the pectoral fins all the way to where the opercula meet.
2. Locate the **heart**. It will be in the cavity anterior to the pectoral fins. Use the scissors to snip the aorta (large, white tube on top of the heart) and remove the heart.
3. The large, brownish organ in the body cavity posterior to the pectoral fins is the **liver**. It is used to synthesize and secrete the essential nutrients that were contained in the food. It plays a part in maintaining the proper levels of blood chemicals and sugars. The **gall bladder**, which is attached to the liver, contains green bile which in part is used to help digest fats.
4. Locate and remove the **alimentary canal**. It starts at the esophagus which is connected to the mouth and ends at the intestines at the vent. Once removed, locate the following:

Esophagus: muscular tube that moves food from the mouth to the stomach

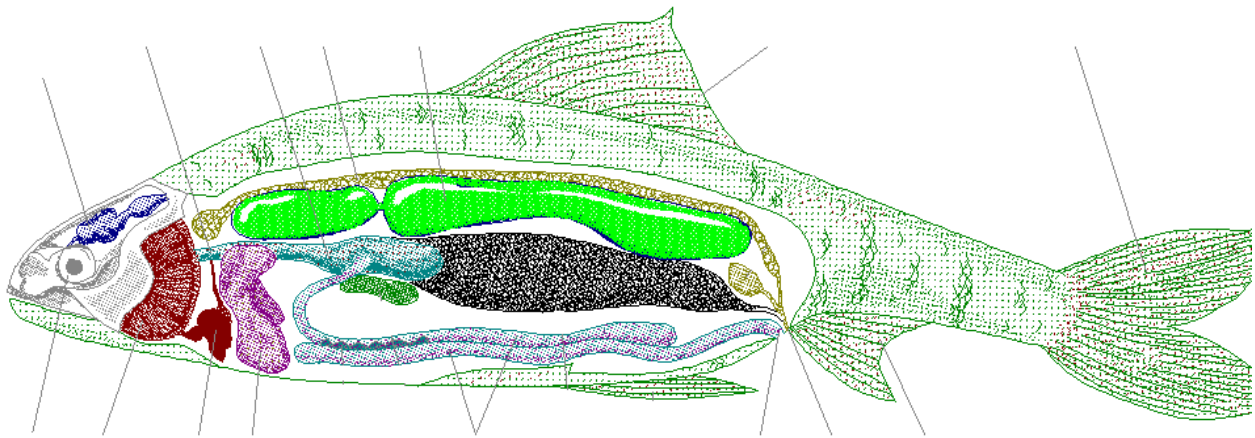
Stomach: a saclike organ that receives the food from the esophagus; mechanical digestion occurs here

Intestines: tube running from the vent to the stomach; chemical digestion and nutrient absorption occurs here

5. The **air bladder** is the only remaining organ in the body cavity. It is a whitish organ and the fish use it to control their buoyancy. They can inflate or deflate it with gas. Remove the air bladder.
6. The dark red line along the backbone is the **kidney**. The forward part of the kidney of a fish functions to replace red blood cells, and the rearward part filters waste out of the blood. The kidney can be removed by slicing through the membrane along each side, and then scraping with a spoon.
7. What is left is the body cavity, or **coelom**, that houses major organs. If your fish is female, you should find the **ovaries** near the vent—they are an orange mass of eggs. Fish lay thousands of eggs and only a small percentage ever makes it to adulthood. If your fish is male, you should find a bladder of **milt**, or fish sperm, near the vent. Reproduction is carried out when the female deposits her eggs into the water and the male quickly fertilizes them with his sperm—this is called **external fertilization**. Any resulting fertilized eggs will develop in the water column without aid from the parents.
8. Is your fish male or female? _____
9. Clean up by disposing of the fish, cleaning the dissection materials and wiping down your lab area.

Post Lab Questions

1. Identify the structures in the diagram below.



<http://cas.bellarmine.edu/tietjen/AnimalDiversity/fish!.gif>

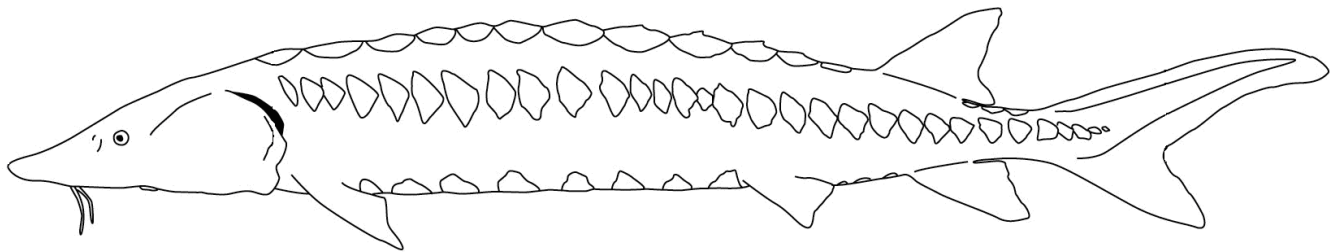
2. What external features (3) separate bony fish from sharks?

3. What internal features (2) separate bony fish from sharks?

4. How is swimming accomplished in bony fish as compared to sharks?

5. What sensory organs do sharks and bony fish both have? What sensory structures are unique to sharks?

The following is a diagram of a sturgeon. These organisms have a cartilaginous skeleton, heterocercal caudal fin, and ganoid scales. Use it to answer the following questions.



Credit: Damon-Randall et al. in press, Atlantic Sturgeon Research Protocols

6. Label the diagram with as many external structures as possible.

7. Does this organism live on the bottom or does it swim in the water column? How can you tell? _____

8. What structures COULD make this organism a shark? A bony fish?

9. Are sturgeon sharks or bony fish? Use structures that you know from sharks and this lab to support your decision. Explain why you made that choice.

Dissection procedures modified from

<http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/region2/ie/sicc/dissectn.cfm#parts%20of%20a%20fish>